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SUBJECT: Prime Minister Speaks About Coalition Government

¶1. In a lengthy newspaper interview published January 10 Prime Minister Raila Odinga revealed candidly his thoughts on the Coalition government, his relations with President Kibaki, his expectations for the U.S.-Kenya relationship, and the state of Kenya one year after the compromised elections of December 2007.

¶2. Excerpts and highlights from the interview follow:

-- "The country has changed fundamentally" over the past year, according to the PM. Kenyans have seen first hand that united and organized action can result in positive political changes.

-- The unprecedented level of post-election violence was a result of a chain reaction of grievances, unresolved disputes, and historical injustices that were simmering for years, but set off by election rigging.

-- The shoot-to-kill orders given the police amounted to state-sponsored terrorism, and resulted in more than 50 percent of the deaths. Protests, on the other hand, were spontaneous and not organized. ODM, confident in its victory at the polls did not organize or plan violence.

-- The PM is most proud of establishing the Office of the Prime Minister, a new institution that is drawing power from the presidency and creating more balanced government. On the other hand, lack of capacity, resources, personnel, and infrastructure is limiting the PM's ability to extend his authority.

-- Lack of progress on the reform agenda is directly related to the expenditure of time, effort, and resources needed to establish the Coalition Government. The need to compromise within the Coalition Government has set back progress on implementation of the reform agenda.

-- On relations with the President: "It's fairly positive and cordial. We have weekly meetings in which we compare notes and agree on agendas. We agree most of the time." However, the PM blamed those around the president for creating obstacles to implementation and undermining his authority and position. For example, Raila said the head of the civil service, who remains under the Office of the President, is still holding regular meetings with permanent secretaries and issuing instructions, when that function should not rightly fall to the Office of the Prime Minister.

-- On accountability for post-election violence, the Prime Minister insisted that those guilty of serious crimes against humanity must be punished, regardless of their positions. However, of concern is that members of law enforcement agencies are implicated in the violence. One cannot expect the police, for example, to investigate and bring to justice members of the police. As a means of ensuring accountability, the practice in Kenya of appointing commissions has proven to be more a means of diverting attention than actually resolving issues.

-- The PM averred that democracy in Africa is on a downward trend. Military and single-party dictators were brought down on the wind of change that affected the continent in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. Multi-party democracies filled the void, but in

many cases were unprepared and ill-suited to lead. Opposition parties are gaining strength and challenging the entrenched elite, but the culture of relinquishing power is not present in Africa, and the African Union is impotent to act.

-- On U.S.-Kenya relations under President-elect Obama: The PM decried what he called lies and allegations repeated by the Kenyan media with regard to his personal ties to Barack Obama - that the PM is a Muslim, or a communist, and that he had received funding from Obama.

-- "We don't expect a special relationship with the U.S. on the basis of Obama's biological relationship to Kenya. He is an American president. His duty and loyalty are first and foremost to the America. However, we expect, based on the policies he has expounded with regard to Africa, that there is going to be a new page in the U.S.-African relationship which will be mutually beneficial to the two continents. We don't expect any kind of charity from the U.S. But we hope that through Obama, the relationship can be more intimate."

RANNEBERGER